oregon voice

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cursed

oregon voice spring 2020 cursed issue

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letters from

After we publish this issue, the end of the pandemic is still nowhere in sight. When will it get better? I brought a dog home from the shelter today. His name is Thymus like the primary organ of the immune system where T cells mature. These cells fend off foreign bodies (viruses and the like). My mom went to school to become a massage therapist when I was a baby, but old enough to remember this: tap with two or three fingers above your sternum and say, "Come on thymus, make those T cells!" I chanted this, stomped around my Lola's kitchen, with the hollowed drumming of my tiny fingers on my tiny chest until I thought I'd helped my thymus make more T cells, or until my chest got sore from the thudding. When will it get better? It was a beautiful day in Eugene, the best a Eugene spring has to offer, and if you know this kind of day, you know the spellbinding way it erases the bleak days before it. Thymus was well-behaved on our walk and now he's asleep next to me.

I'm happy to present this issue and I hope it makes your day a little better.

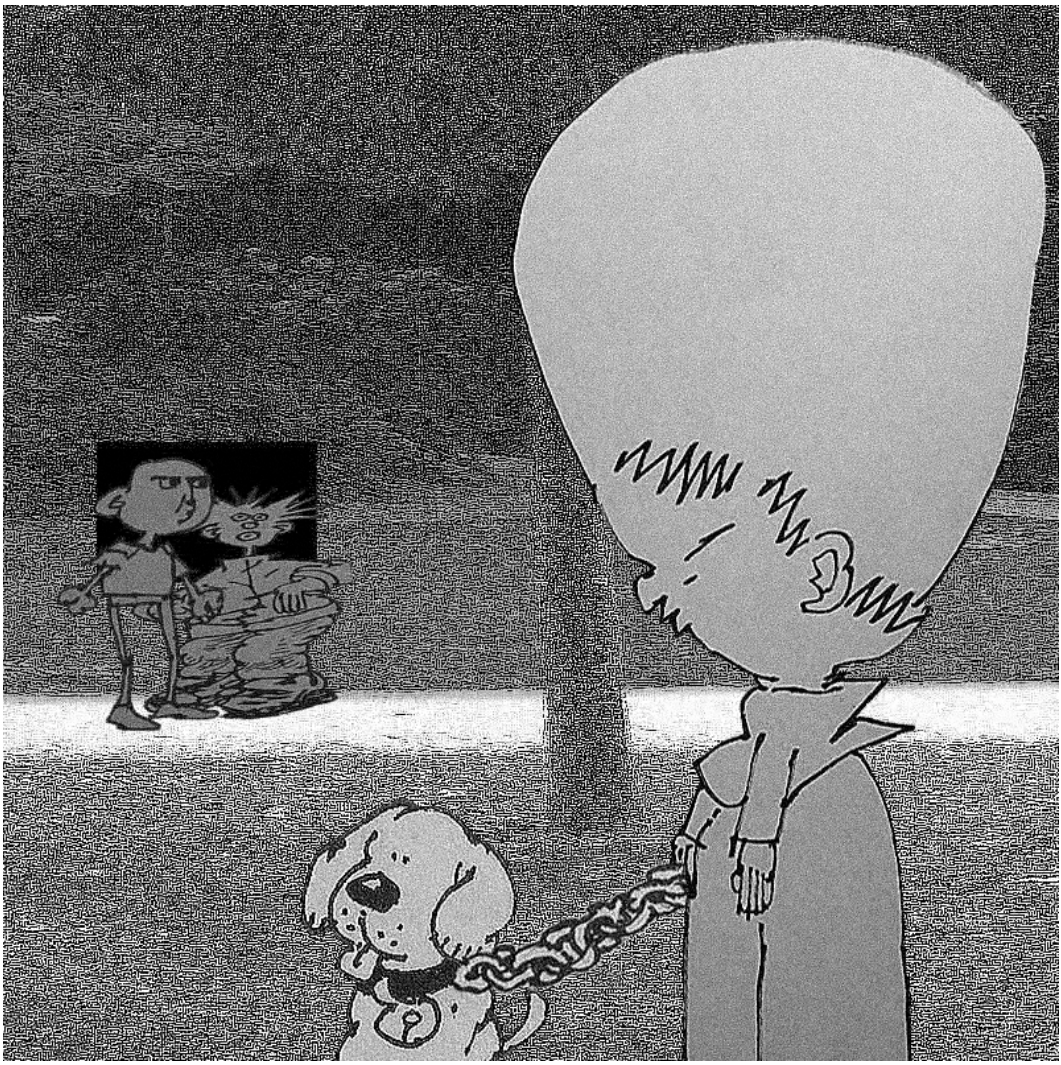
All the best,
Kaya

the editors

In a world filled with cursed things, it feels truly special to come together and make a magazine with your friends. In this issue, we celebrate, acknowledge, and decry the cursed things around us. We welcome you to do the same.

Until next time,
Tuesday

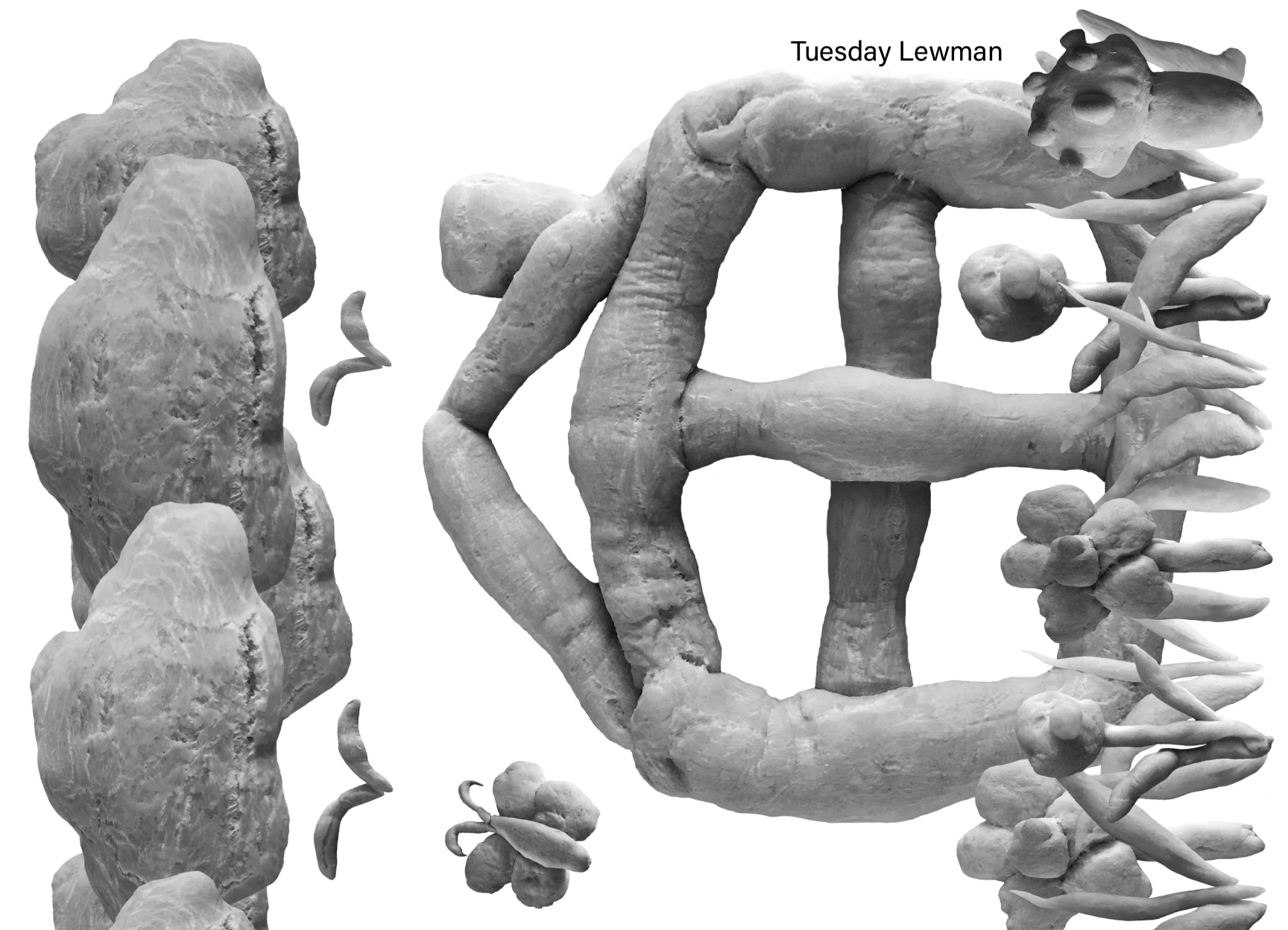
My Child Reads
Oregon Voice



Acme McConnell

modelled by adrian ficus

Jonathan Roensch


Tuesday Lewman

Rosemary Potato Soup

Prep: 10 min
Cook: 35 min
Approximately 60¢ per serving

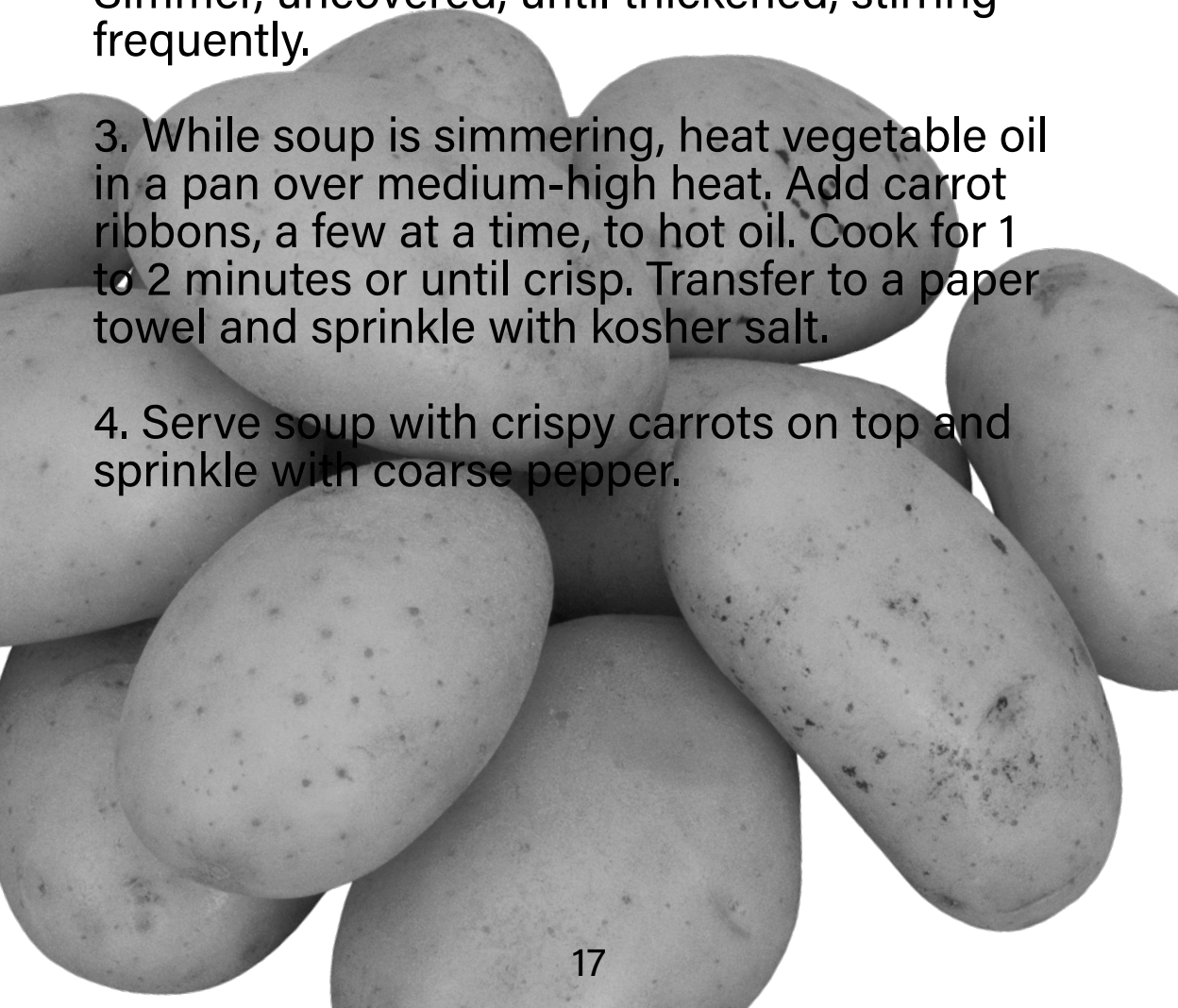
Ingredients
2 tbsp. butter
1 yellow or white onion
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. pepper
6 medium russet or white potatoes, peeled and cut into 2-inch cubes
4 cups water
1 tsp. fresh or dried rosemary, crushed
For crispy carrots:
1/3 cup vegetable oil
2 carrots, peeled then cut into ribbons with a vegetable peeler
Kosher salt
Coarse ground black pepper

1. In a large pot, melt butter over medium heat. Add onion, salt, and pepper. Cook until onions are translucent. Add potatoes, 2 cups of water, and rosemary. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Simmer, covered, for 20 minutes or until potatoes are fork tender. Remove from heat.

2. With a potato masher, mash potatoes until smooth. Return to pot and add remaining 2 cups of water. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Simmer, uncovered, until thickened, stirring frequently.

3. While soup is simmering, heat vegetable oil in a pan over medium-high heat. Add carrot ribbons, a few at a time, to hot oil. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes or until crisp. Transfer to a paper towel and sprinkle with kosher salt.

4. Serve soup with crispy carrots on top and sprinkle with coarse pepper.



YUM! RECIPES! YUM!

3 more cheap and easy recipes from our kitchens to yours <3

The VEBB
(Very Effective Breakfast Burrito)

Ingredients:

- -2 eggs (3 if very hungry)
- -1 tablespoon of butter
- -grated cheddar cheese
- -1 small can of refried beans
- -1 large flour tortilla
- -sour cream
- -a yummy spicy salsa
- -salt
- -pepper

1. Spread a thin layer of refried beans on the tortilla with the back of a spoon. Make sure to leave about an inch of bare tortilla around the edge. Put this on a plate for later.

2. Crack eggs into a bowl and beat with a fork until completely mixed. Add a pinch of salt.

3. Put your pan on medium high heat and put your butter in there. Get your bowl of beaten eggs and when the butter is hot and bubbly pour the eggs into the pan. They will cook fast, which we want because we're basically just making a diner omelet. As soon as it is solid enough to stay together, flip the omelet with a spatula and take the pan off of the heat.

4. Off the heat, sprinkle grated cheddar onto the omelet then fold it in half so that the cheese melts.

5. Place the omelet on the bean covered tortilla (I like to cut my omelet into three pieces so I can rearrange it as a rectangle on the tortilla, which makes it wrap up uniformly). Spread sour cream and salsa on the omelet.

6. To wrap it up, tuck in two sides of the tortilla and roll it up so the ends are sealed. Take a little bit of water or salsa juice and get the seam of the burrito a little bit wet.

7. Put the pan on medium heat and put the burrito seam down in the pan and give it a little press. This will seal it up, then you can turn the burrito in the pan to get the whole thing nice and golden brown and heat up the beans.

8. Let it cool for a few minutes, pour yourself some coffee, and enjoy!

The VEEM (Very Effective Egg Mcmuffin)

Ingredients:

-1 egg (2 if very hungry)
-2 tablespoons of butter
-2 slices of cheddar cheese
-1 English muffin
-2 slices of bacon or 1 sausage patty or 1 slice of spam
-ketchup (if you want the true McMuffin flavor)
-salt
-pepper

1. Cook your selected meat in a pan on medium heat. While that's happening, split the English muffin and put it in the toaster on a light setting (the muffin should still be soft, just warm and a little crispy)

2. When the meat is almost done, push it to the edge of the pan and crack your egg into the puddle of grease it left behind. Break the yolk so it flows all over the white, then flip the egg and put one slice of cheese on the egg and the other on the meat. Sprinkle on some salt and pepper and then place a lid on the pan to let the cheese melt.

3. Butter the toasted English muffin and add a tiny bit of ketchup (you don't want much). Place the meat on the muffin, the eggs on the meat, and then the muffin on the eggs.

4. Let it cool for a few minutes, put it in your pocket, and eat it on the way to work!

Lala's Polvoron (shortbread)

Ingredients:

- 1 cup all purpose flour (or rice flour for gluten-free)
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup powdered milk
- 5 tbsp. melted butter

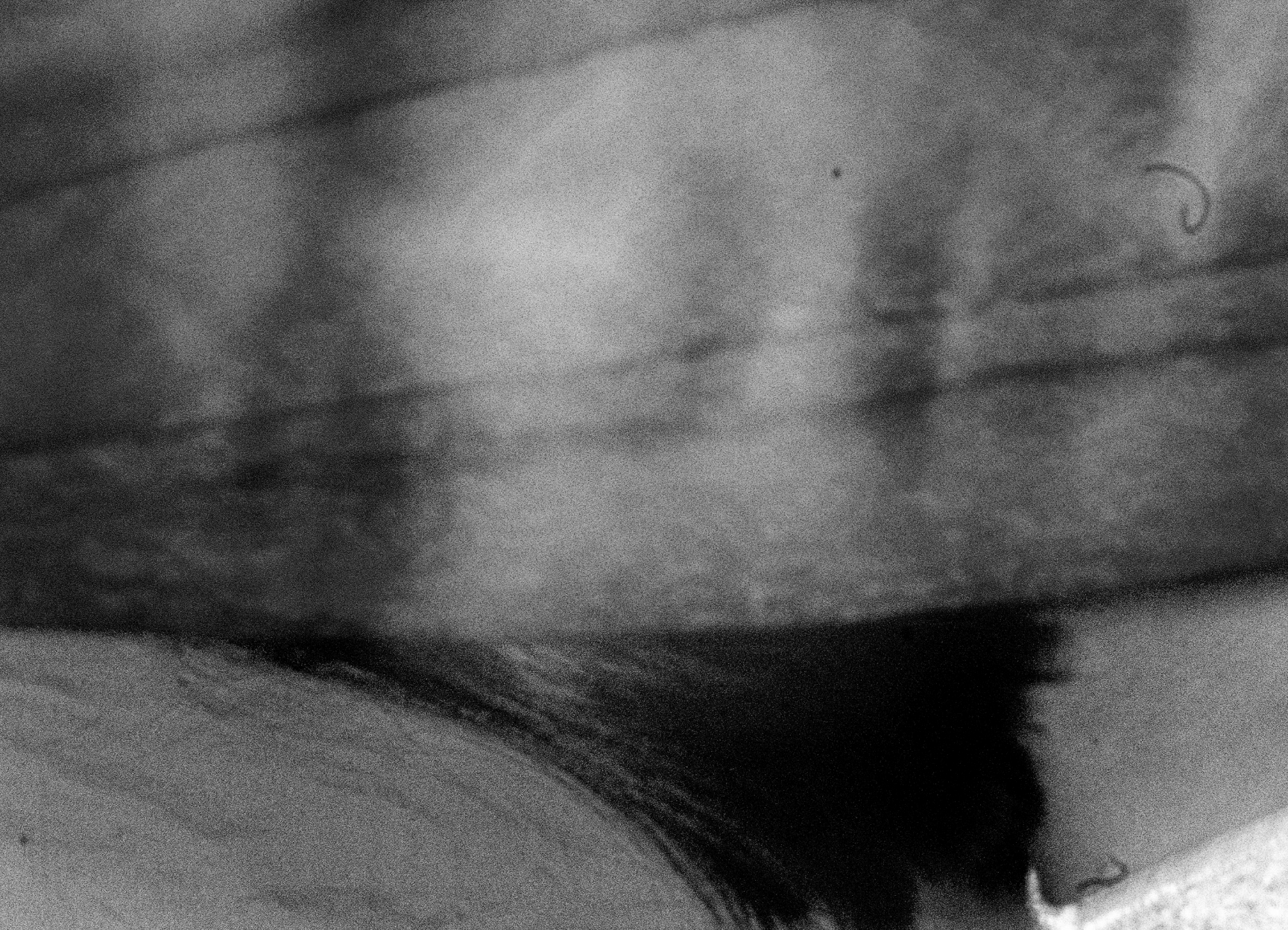
1. Toast flour in a skillet over medium heat until light brown.

2. Mix sugar and powdered milk.

3. Melt butter and add to mixture. Mix thoroughly.

4. Press mixture into molds and let chill in the fridge for 10 minutes.

5. Carefully remove from molds. Yummy dipped in coffee or on top of ice cream.



Isa Ramos

How to Build Something That Lasts

by Kaya Noteboom

FICTION

Folded deep within the pleated layers of the universe, encased in the warm lipid walls of the creators' cozy dwelling, Toppen searched around Henri's gaping mouth with such zeal it seemed they might finally give in to their mutual desire to swallow and be swallowed by one another. Meanwhile, the 300 miles of atmosphere above Earth, collapsed. A tone resonated from the sky. The low drone lathered the continents and permeated what measly oceans we had left with a volume and abruptness that arrested the senses to the extent that every living creature released their bowels at once. In life, we choked the planet with our waste, and in death, it was cosmic poetry to go quietly in a calm sea of our own shit. We didn't try to stop it. In the middle of our lives, we turned our bellies to the sky, and closed our eyes.

Henri and Toppen hadn't realized what happened until after they engaged in a rowdy commotion which could've been a number of things, not excluding fly fishing. As they collapsed onto each other in sighs of sleepy rapture, the damning accumulation of responsibilities on Earth that went momentarily forgotten remerged slowly like a developing image in a polaroid picture. They wrestled out of their fleshy tangle of perfectly sculpted limbs and saw to their duties with the enthusiasm one would approach a detailed planner or attending an improv performance at a local community center. To Henri's surprise and guilt-ridden though immense, pleasure, there was nothing on Earth in need of attending because there was nothing on Earth, nothing but a few robust patches of moss. Henri shuffled across the cavern to Toppen's side and recounted the findings quietly and close to Toppen's ear. Toppen pressed his ear to Henri's lips to listen more attentively, and they both agreed to send the dog.

The moment our lives ended, we were incorporated into something bigger. We plunged into a pool of black and the soft cold wind of spatial expansion whirred past us. Then, we settled to the bottom. Darkness opened up around us. From that darkness, a barking dog bounded in mile-long strides and flung tapestries of slobber from its jowls. It lunged at our throats, but then, centimeters away from a second death, the dog sat as if by command. It cocked its head obediently and allowed its jaws to relax, letting its tongue fall to the floor like a spongey step ladder.

We followed one another inside. Beyond hulking urine yellow stained molars was more darkness, darkness that narrowed to a pin the further we looked. We walked on steadily like the ground was clean tile and not the digestive tract of a presumable carnivore of apex proportion. On and on we trekked in shadow, utterly unaware and unconcerned with time. Here inside the dog, time wasn't so much an unanswered question, but a question no one thought to ask. We didn't think to ask anything even though civilizations on Earth were erected and annihilated around ideas people had about what would happen when we got here, and we all got it wrong—especially those who thought nothing—so we walked on without question feeling mighty humbled to not be in Hell.

We arrived when we could walk no further. Nothing physical obscured our path, but something more real like intuition told us to stop. The realization was slow to diffuse among us at first. A wave of bodies tried to push forward, realized they shouldn't, then stopped. Another wave, and then another, until every creature who perished in the mass extinction compacted into a solid form. We couldn't see, but we felt one another all around us. There was no telling where one body ended and another began. Skin, scales, feathers, exoskeletons, filaments, fronds, and shells—all the organic textures on Earth cavorted in the dark.

What was known of the dog to Henri and Toppen was only through what they had discovered firsthand. They knew the dog lived with every one of its paws in a different galaxy, a carrier and guardian of universal messages which traversed the universe on the backs of fleas. Its fur and limbs were the fabric which held our universe together, its belly was our creator's home, and this was all they knew when they made us. Like many people on Earth, we were made by accident when the wily sprays of fly fishing flew to places they weren't expected to land. These accidents often times were happy ones, and for the most part, so were we. If it wasn't for us, there would be no them. At the rate which Henri and Toppen had begun to feast on one another, they would've whittled each other down to their metatarsals, annihilating each other along with the love they were so carnivorously inspired by. They would've lived short lives as small stars that burn too hot and too fast to ever grow big. Our existence was a gift of longevity for them. They spent time apart every day monitoring us, time they would've gladly spent gnawing at each other's arms and breasts. They prided the work they did separately, but became lethargic and weepy when their absence was felt for too long. It was not uncommon to witness one sprout a small prototype of the other from their forehead when they felt lonely. Henri resented how easily she could be absorbed into her work, and on nights when she came home to the great belly exhausted, she wished she loved her work on Earth a little less. Toppen was her biggest supporter and dutiful worshiper. He loved to watch her in the garden pulling carbon compounds apart. We gave them a sense of duty and in doing so, we taught them to love in moderation.

This accident, one miraculous drop caught enough momentum from an epic thrust to shoot out of the dog's belly, through its internal passageways, out its mouth, and floated in empty space until it landed on a rock shaken loose from a small star that burned too hot too fast and exploded. With that, we were birthed first as celestial bacteria. Over millions of years we took form in ways neither Henri nor Toppen knew possible, and became more unpredictable as we grew brains and soon enough, grew feelings. Seeing our quickening fallibility, Henri and Toppen felt a responsibility to step in. In a long series of best-guesses, they helped the best they knew how. When they sent the dog after the atmosphere gave way, exposing us all to the harsh cold and merciless pressure of space, leaving us stunned and floating like turds in a sea of our shit, they didn't know what would happen. It was just their best-guess.

Our wiggling subsided when we smelled a whisper of smoke. At first it was faint, but when our eyes adjusted to the introduction of shuttering dim light, we detected a small flame on the floor in front of us. The newfound light hinted at the dimensions of our surroundings, which were huge. We were inside a cavern with rounded walls and a domed ceiling. It all was covered in a velvety fuzz. It was also damp and warm. If studied closely, the walls lifted and fell like the tummy of a baby laying on its back. The walls were both impossibly close and far away. This is because we were the walls. We didn't know it then, but when we condensed, we were funneling into the walls of the belly of the universe.

We looked across the cavern and saw the multitude of faces who had died with us, as well as everyone who died before, stacked on top of one another. A President was flanked by a 112-year-old sturgeon. A fat one-eyed tabby cat and a six-year-old boy shared close quarters, but neither thought to run or chase. Perhaps it was the paradoxical position—the cancellation of space between neighboring bodies, and the immeasurable space between those we looked out at—that allowed our consciousnesses to merge as a singular mind which could remember each of our individual lives from before. In a single moment, we recalled the history of life on Earth because it was all of us who sprung from Henri and Toppen's spray, out of this belly, and onto a rock. Our DNA was present in the first bacteria and everything that followed. We remembered the lives of moss, dung beetles, Steve-O, persimmons, and koalas.

The flame grew until it resembled an aluminum gas lantern. In murky shadows, it revealed more of what the great belly contained. On the floor, next to heap of sand, laid a gorgeous heap of muscle, skin, and bone. We studied the soft mass as it rose from slumber. It unraveled into two separate entities that appeared humanoid in nearly every manner except the skin over their bodies was translucent, making visible every immaculate pulsing blue organ, which gave even their stillest moments a sense of dance and play. A small and short-lived religion founded at a squat coffee table during a game of Mahjongg in a dank one bedroom apartment above a knock-off Disney merchandise shop in Cebu, Philippines, had deities that approximated the two celestial beings they called, The Butcher and The Baker.

Their names were given presuming each celestial governed exclusively, but in truth, they shared in most if not all duties concerning Earth. They were unequally adept at some tasks, nevertheless, they shared. Henri, The Butcher, oversaw elemental decay. This was alchemy of the most sacred sort. Henri removed particles of certain mineral compounds in carefully orchestrated stages to transform matter back into universal material. The sacred magic of this work easily drove Henri to fevered obsession. To stagger her fits of alienating passion, Henri casually practiced forming meiotic cells from which new life began. Henri's cells were imperfect always, but her clumsy assembly allowed for mutations which sometimes saved a species, or spurred entirely new ones.

Toppen, The Baker, prepared perfect meiotic cells on baking sheets which were the foundation of all life. He took extreme precaution of their exposure to heat by encasing the translucent pinkish brown half-spheres in an elastic film of his spit. Before setting the cells out to jellify and ferment, Toppen cradled each cell in the crook of his neck. He whispered encouragements to them and sang his favorite of folk songs borrowed from Earth. However, baking demanded unwavering calm and patience that Toppen occasionally ran out of. Perfection weighed heavy on his lean shoulders. Toppen feared failure with each fresh batch of cells, knowing good and well the potential rewards of failure, and stopped working. When Toppen stopped baking new cells, cancers and diseases of the mind grew without resistance. Things died this way. Toppen did his share of butchering.

Work was work, but their real lives were at home. Not long after we arrived, there soon was a third. Ori was born with a rattling tongue that slapped against their chin when they cried for the first time. They were covered in a thin layer of dust, pink and warm as the newborn mammals on Earth were. After an especially spastic round of fly fishing, we noticed Henri's body began to swell. A tough, husked fruit formed about her navel. Ori broke through the thick skin on Henri's belly like a cherry tomato bursting in a mouth. They were born stern with something important to say, a mission set in their mind from the very beginning.

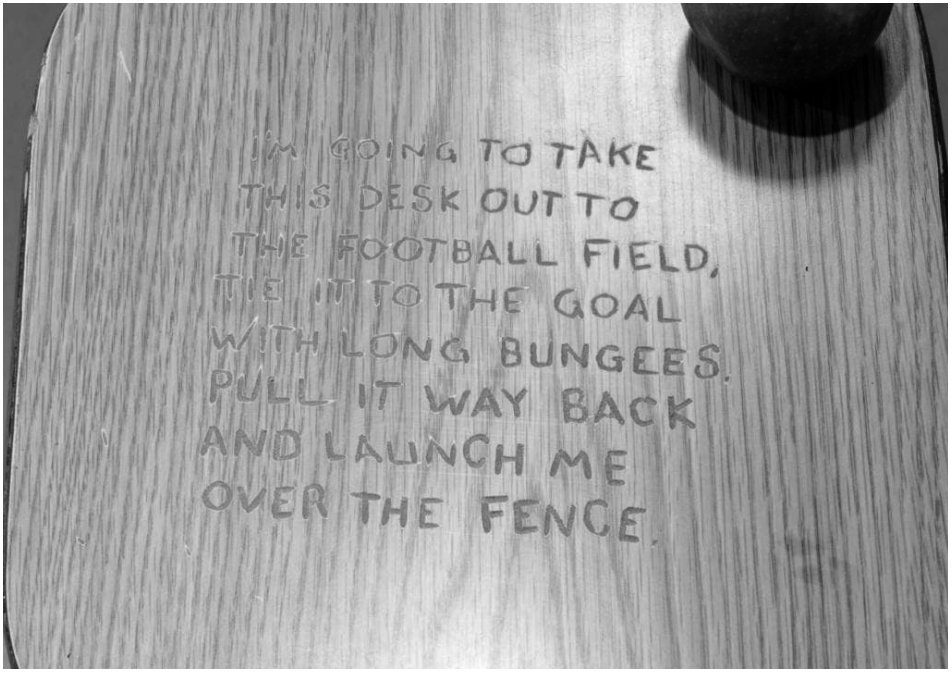
A teaching relationship was established immediately between Ori and their parents, Henri, and Toppen, but these lessons were not always openly received. The three of them mostly enjoyed their lives together in the great belly as the most powerful family in the universe—the only family in the universe—though Toppen and Henri probably enjoyed it more. Before Ori knew how to speak, they communicated with Henri and Toppen through facial cues and breastfeeding. The transference of milk from teat to mouth is the most direct channel of communication known to exists. However, the information Ori contained in their brain from birth was more than either Henri or Toppen could stand to know. After trying a few latches each, Henri and Toppen both succumbed to severe brain fog and vertigo. They had to adopt new methods of feeding Ori which included milking each other like cows, which made all three of them frown. But with this new, divinely serious and plump member of the belly, they experienced longing for each other unlike ever before. When the duties of Earth beckoned them away from each other, they always knew they would return home soon, but now home had its own set of duties which meant every moment alone together could be interrupted with the coo or whimper or shrill cry of sweet baby Ori. They made moments when they could. They alternated waking each other up from afternoon naps with syphoning hot syrupy breath into each other's ears, and they loved to cook.

They made dinner together with ingredients from all climates sourced from the great belly's abundantly fertile soil. At dinner, they joked, thinking better of it to

avoid political matters, but nevertheless, they came up. Ori was a stark believer of the unsentimental, the big picture, and chaos for the sake of innovation. Henri was romantically attached to the apparent unity of things as it was her daily work to unwind DNA from its tight spools back to its most simple form which could be traced back to every iteration of life in a common thread. It offended her to know that Ori was not swept up in the beauty of this, given their celestial pedestal. It hurt Henri so much that a child of hers and Toppen's wouldn't see the harmony she saw. But Ori was attuned to something else—something which accepted the connection of all matter as basic fact not to be inspired by. Ori was beginning to form ideas that would take eons of blind trust and love for Henri to understand.

At dinner, Henri chose to believe that Ori did see things her way, but enjoyed being the contrarian child too much to say so. Henri remarked over their full plates how no element of the meal outshined another, each flavor depended on its neighbors as a delicious ecosystem. Ori rolled their eyes, and then so began their bickering. Both were equally impassioned and refused to leave their stance. Ori showed it with frigid indifference where Henri fought from deep in her core. The fighting would never end if Toppen didn't wrestle them both to the ground demanding reprieve. Only when Henri's breath slowed and Ori's tense brows released did Toppen let them up. Ori extended a pudgy hand to Henri, who batted it away. Just as Ori turned, defeated, Henri leapt and burrowed her fingers deep into their chubby armpits until they cried from laughter. After dinner, they played on the floor of the great belly. Henri and Toppen took turns rolling unripe stone-fruits into Ori's feet as they sat with their nose buried in a grand book.

There was quite a deal more playing and dinner after the extinction, but time was mostly spent with Toppen and Henri breathing through their pain as they listened to the child at their teat. They learned from Ori the ways they had failed. Ori was stern with them, but it was what they needed. Years together just the two of them made them soft and greedy for each other's attention, but Ori woke them up to possibilities bigger than themselves. The first Earth failed. With Ori as their teacher, they would learn how to build something that lasts.



Clancy O'Connor

cursed

Joe Biden apologists

TLC network

Depop user ego

Elon Musk's pronunciation of X Æ A-12

People from high school going live on Instagram

Roloff Farms pumpkin salsa variety pack

The Oregon Voice

3 p.m.

Monkey circus

Caroline Calloway

Yumm Sauce

Bindi Irwin commemorative wedding candle

blessed

Sweet Tomatoes (RIP)

Wallace and Gromit

Bologna sandwich

Bindi Irwin

Little Caesars

PPPM majors

Miniature enthusiasts

Justin Bieber: Seasons

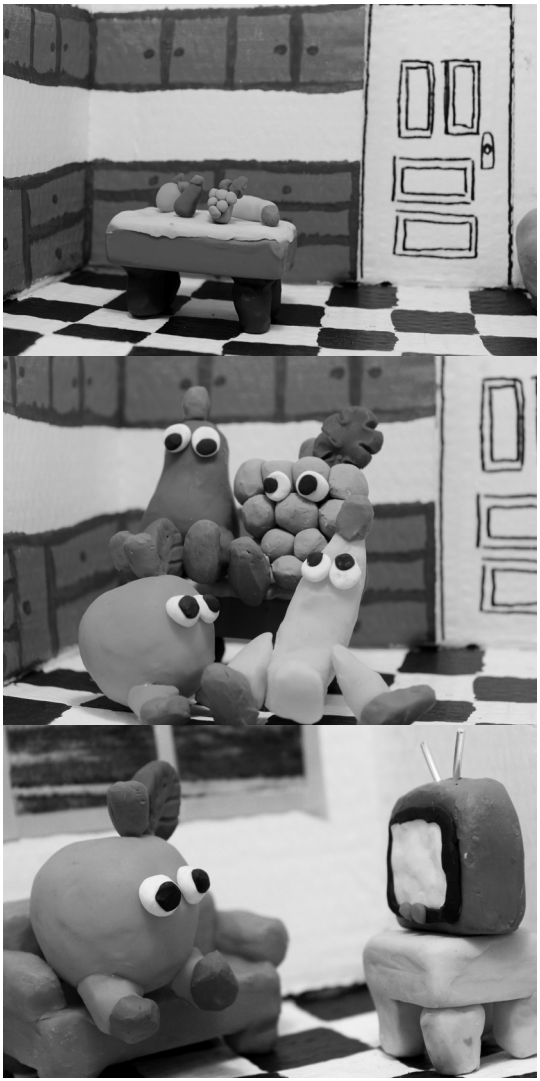
Britney Spears

Grimes's pronunciation of X Æ A-12

People who answer the phone with "yellow?"

Emma Fale-Olsen

KITCHEN



KABOODLE

Gillian Arthur

WALTER

Julian Croman

Coronavirus and My Itty Bitty Bladder

by Anika Nykanen

I've always had a tiny bladder. It's travel size. Small enough not to get flagged at security if I had to pack it out of my body and tuck it in my carry on like a 3 oz bottle of Listerine.

I pee constantly. I am someone who argues with flight attendants to use the restroom during take-offs and landings. I will shamelessly scrape back my chair in a dead-quiet auditorium and "please excuse" my way between desks to use the restroom during a 50-minute lecture. I have begged to pee at coffee shops and gas stations where I am not a customer. My Pomeranian-size bladder has given me an unwanted "May I speak to the manager" vibe.

But since quarantine, my bladder seems to have shrunk even further. For the first time in my life, I wake up twice, sometimes three times a night to urinate. It's like I've given birth and reared three children, gone through menopause, and entered old age. But I haven't. I'm young and lazy with nothing to do all day but disintegrate in front of Netflix, beg the unemployment office for benefits, and let my body function on a not too-regular schedule.

Nonetheless, every night I am yanked out of bizarre quarantine dreams—inexplicably set in warm tropical lagoons—to an urgent pressure in my groin. Initially, I spent several early mornings after an unwanted pee searching WebMD for answers. I wondered if it could be a urinary tract infection or diabetes. It definitely was not an enlarged prostate.

Only when I read an article by Lori Gottlieb in the New York Times about the symptoms of grief that might be associated with the pandemic, did I begin to understand the possible cause of my excessive nightly peeing. Although frequent urination wasn't one of the symptoms she outlined, the pandemic has made me extremely anxious, and I think this anxiety has resulted in an inability to hold it through the night.

I'm horrified by the devastation in hospitals across the world and I'm anxious for the health of my loved ones. But, like many people graduating in 2020, I'm also anxious about finishing college during the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression. I'm anxious about the loss of my income as a laid-off restaurant worker. I'm anxious about launching myself during a widespread hiring freeze.

Contrary to Freudian psychoanalytical theory, insight into the issue has not resulted in its cure. Instead, I'm exhausted from getting up three times a night. I've started to fantasize about a catheter. A neat little tube seamlessly connecting my urethra to a gallon-size

drainage bag beside my bed.

My mom has sent me links to live yoga classes to help me destress. My therapist has recommended breathing exercises. IG ads tell me I could find solace during quarantine in brightly-colored bath bombs. But as much as I love a good bath, I don't anticipate I'll be able to self-care my way into a full night's sleep.

Instead, I'd like everyone reading this to consider sending me 50 cents. My Venmo is Anika-Nykanen. I'm saving up for financial stability. Failing that, I've got a piss bag in my shopping cart at www.liberatormedical.com

ESSAYS

Notes From Quar

by Maggie Dixon

As I am writing this, I am expecting within the upcoming weeks to scroll pass countless articles and essays published outlining love in the time of corona. It is rather humorous and pointless. Lovers sharing anecdotes of how living together under quarantine has made them reflect on their relationship, or how this pandemic has left someone to question whether they should reach out to an ex, are simply situational. Arguably, those who view a pandemic as romantic, only may consider it in that way due to the possible confrontation with death (which deserves its own analysis). These pieces serve as entertainment to obscure the examination of interpersonal relationships. By treating media conglomerates as one would a close friend, in turn, these details produce clickbait. Spare the details; The publication of intimate stories as a diversion to the pandemic fails to recognize the function of desire. A collection of blurbs on Vice shows us nothing but how one spent their time. If writers are so concerned with dating in our current age, they could at least attempt to call into question their reasonings for why they are writing these pieces in the first place. The driving force behind these pieces is a lack of self awareness. Producing content based off of one's intimate details does not sit well with me. What is the purpose of asking readers to share accounts from quarantine which lack introspection? To write cheap essays reminding the masses we are all in this together? Because the matter of fact is the experience of COVID 19 is dependent on class. The narcissistic drive of self-indulgent storytelling in conjunction with the mass production of online media content ultimately has created a surplus of irreverent "cultural commentary". Undoubtedly, this synthesis of narcissism and the culture industry has provoked writers (influencers) to be overt, mundane confessionals.

Nor am I concerned with how corona will permute dating culture. The commodification of love under late capitalism due to dating apps, services, and even social media, already altered the manner in which we date. In this regard,

quarantine will not change the habits of those who participate on apps like tinder or grindr. With tinder unlocking the passport option for free, there has been a mass influx in app usage. Even better now, tinder can profit from your endless swiping in a foreign location from the comfort of quar. However, we all know these apps are used for hookups, but still the interactions via the algorithm will stay the same. Dependent on the algorithm and the convenience of apps, e-dating is the future whether that is considered to be ethical or not. In the case of social media, it only has two purposes: ideology and to slide into DMs. This should come as no surprise to those who are extremely online. The web was invented solely to purchase books and to be horny without the tangible presence of the other. Our current progression and reliance on the algorithm to socialize leaves me to question the implications of the body. While the screen serves as a mediator between two, being experiences intimacy by proxy. Being is not solely in relation with the other but it is through iMessage or DMs, the other is interpreted. The lack of presence yet in instant written communication thus leaves users (Being) in a dissociative disposition. There's the opportunity to speak to someone with flirtatious motives yet there is no possible way of acting on these urges (well, there's phone sex but that's not the point) leaving one to yearn via the algorithm. With that said, post COVID, dating standards will not be amended rather reinforced as a result of accessibility.

Writers (using that term loosely) of this vein fail to grasp what love looks like under late capitalism. An analysis of contemporary relationships cannot be formed without a critique of capital. It is not simply COVID or dating apps, but it is free market principles being applied to interpersonal relationships. Maybe this is a trad take and I just sound like someone who was radicalized after reading elementary particles by Houellebecq. I am not implying that love does not exist outside of the commodity form. However, the laissez faire approach to one's relationships is all too common. As a result of individualist capitalism, the notion of holding oneself responsible towards another is skewed. Relationships become an act purely for the self and away from the other. This is not desire.

Hyacinth Schukis

From a counter

Sent across days,
Slamming "there" amid softening face,
That thing you left on the counter reels.

It knows, see, stagnant might save.
That thing you rushed at young,
Knocking toward attention and
Splitting it against misplaced light.

Yes, did try to pocket its quick,
Pull its bend in.
Always a sway,
You will always be seen.

Clips, keys, receipts and fidelity.
Things it's come between
In its time of you.
Sub-fresh, lowered,
Yet staggering wry.
Just what you left.

It might not feel right to
Pack up anymore.
All the years of times
It had to be packed,
In case you grew close enough to it.

It might have soured, might be meal,
Might have boiled into some
Uncouth piece of tenderness.
It would have been yours, if at all.

Silence makes polygamy senseless,
Makes it coy to other masses.
Notes to your noise
Scream, wheel, wash
Unfamiliar skin––countertops.

What will even be left
Of you once memory rolls off,
Weathered reasons and wakes.
Preparations foiled foil its own,
That have crashed, left,
Crashed again.

Note––nowhere for these raucous understandings
To go without your use.
Weekdays roll across,
Ends deem themselves near-perfect
(The near-touches).

That thing you left on the counter
has to bloom of you, away and towards
And across, finally.

It won't until worked into it.
You find its edges and yes,
Spend it off.
Now it earns a brash scent
That eyes you through
Any possible frame.

Will wait, still wait,
But will not forget to cry.
Beside the rinse of other ones
Suitable, years of times
It knew it was left.
Only you left it.

Exchanging hands,
That thing you think of,
It left it aside and wed what you set.

Each flash of taste,
A softening undone.

Her Finale

It turns up somewhere done,
Becomes avid and immediate,
Though it cannot.

Scenes of mine and she
collects them, ocean blinks.
Pressing my issue into air
Before I even name it.

Name an affliction
Based on favor.
Name a compulsion
To follow frailty,
And to practice each night,
Burning broken.

Rapturous, she
Let it lift let it
Lie––down the way to
Daze and break sight,
Pearl instruction.

Caves, ridges,
Cyclical traceability.
The likelihood of seeing it
From the beginning.
Combing for ruin,
For reason, for fame.

Gulls rush away,
Never wishing they could have.
Keeping tides concealed,
Keeping track.

Name a delusion based on a day.
Name intuition and dress it.
Bring it back to hear
What it must be.

A decision to never
Make me again.

As far as walls go

Waking up
With the most delicate, covetous
Grief imaginable.
Chores of drawing circles like
Fresh hands every time,
Expunging the blond yarn
Of reason lost.

Smoked inquiries hang
In the closet like something
I'd tell my dad about
If used to.
Praying about cadet blue
Dust praying about English.

Creeks through hustles,
Stupefied chapters that told
On themselves,
That lied.

Too profuse and cacophonous
To continue.

Hailey O'Donnell

Cursed Haikus
by Patrick Riley

When the big one hit
all the dead seismologists
trembled in their graves

Raisins, uneaten
The remains of milk and bran
raisins, raisins, ants

We called the number
on the missing dog poster
thinking it said “god”

The old blimp pilot
exhausted in the cockpit
nodded off, adrift

Okay, Downward Dog
everything is evil
Okay, Upward Dog

If little cousin
bites your arm in the basement
Don’t you make a sound

Nothing feels better
than peeling a basketball
and finding a pearl

POETRY

The Curse of the Bird
by Lisa Deluc

If not this then what?
If not this then what,
A curse of intellect
Mobility of the mind
Marching toward massacre.
Sticky feet
Black goop burning at thin flesh.
"C'est pas grave."
Cursed by annihilation from the antecedent generation.
"It's too hot for February"
When was the last time you saw a bird?
I saw one this morning.
It shat on my car and laughed.
I was late to work again.
I cried in the bathroom during my 10-minute break. I didn't get a chance to pee, oh well.
Yo también.
Tampoco.
Could it be, this is the end?
"This is the end, beautiful friend"
My grandma said if I don't go to church I'll be cursed.
My dad's an atheist.
My mom's a saint.
I'm not gonna live to be very old.
"Did you see that video of the polar bear starving?"
"Yeah. Probably had too many of those appetite-suppressing lollipops."
Today I wrote a poem.
Today I wrote a book.
Yesterday I cured cancer.
Yesterday I saw a bird.
My grandma's got a cold.
She said I was cursed,
I don't wanna grow old.
"Did you get a mask?"
How much longer am I gonna be here?
Probably another year.
Try something creative? I can pick up guitar again.
I'm scared.
I don't wanna grow old.
I saw a bird shit on my car.
It laughed.
I cried.
"Are you okay?"
"She's fine. She's just reading Vonnegut again"
I am a curs'ed cynic.
"So it goes."
How much longer am I gonna be here?
How long have I been here?
I am sacred.
Did you mean Scared?
The birds cried.
The birds laugh.
I laughed.
I cry.
Respire.
Respite.
Hopefully, if she stays home she'll be alright.
Do I get to see how it all ends?
If not this then what.

Tragedy has happened in
by Kezia Setyawan

i.
A week; it feels like the unending undulation
Of muscle memory, like a thread holding into

A fabric woven as ritual, a dull throb on
The back of the head; something that is lived with.

The bent ridges of the fingernail snapping back,
A yolk broken a touch too soon, the spatter
Of scalding oil is pain more tangible nowadays.

The Saugus High School shooter, murderer, sixteen, dead -
Looked like a cousin, or a child I could have.

His mother was with him when he died. I don't know if
That's a privilege. Years later, will she sit at a diner
With whispers still trailing after?

Her last name, Matsuura, a river in southwest Japan
Flowed into names carried across the ocean as
Boats carrying dreams that are half-remembered now.

Those dreams scrubbed away behind barb wires,
entombed by laws against broad noses and coarse black hair.
Or bones buried under railroads from East and West.
Swallowing poison this country feeds us.

ii.
It is cruelty passed down as recipes,
Integrated into epigenetic memories,
The trauma soldered so deep.

Peter Wang died a little over a year ago.
Today I learned if I go back four generations,
We have the same last name, only muddled
By trauma, migration, and belonging.

Am I more plagued with grief
After learning he is kinfolk?

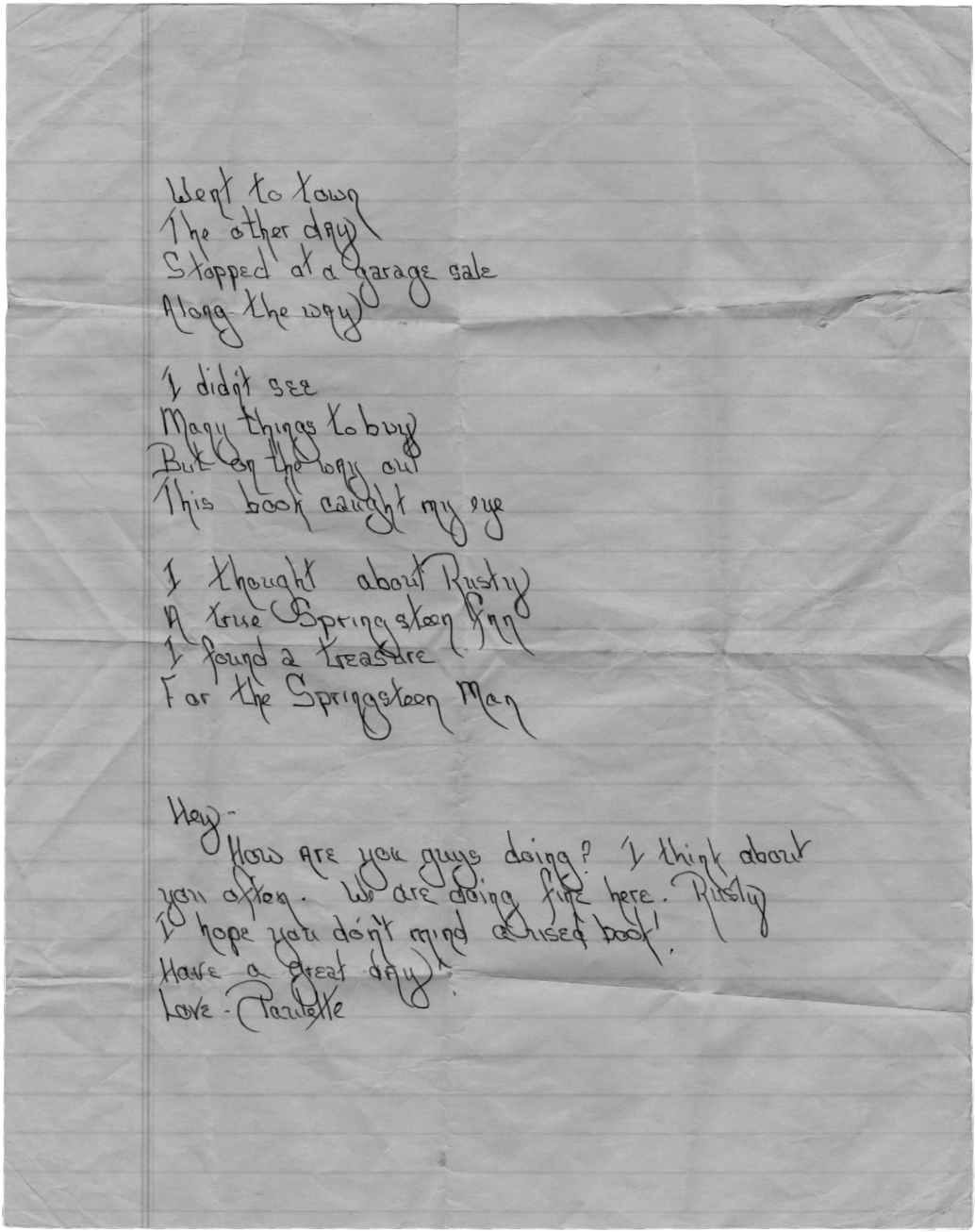
I wonder if either of them believes in an afterlife,
And they stand opposite ends to each other
Thinking how we have identities occupying both ends
Of this American milestone.

Their memories still holding on to us like still water,
The blooming of black algae quickly turning
The hurt now known as this

Ancestral knowledge passing
Through us in a home atop stolen land,
I smile stupid and sad,

We should not know how this feels.

cursed found poem



Went to town
The other day
Stopped at a garage sale
Along the way

I didn't see
Many things to buy
But on the way out
This book caught my eye

I thought about Rusty
A true Springsteen fan
I found a treasure
For the Springsteen Man

Hey-
How are you guys doing? I think about you often. We are doing fine here. Rusty I hope you don't mind a used book!
Have a great day!
Love - Danielle

ALBUM REVIEW

1000 gecs // 100 gecs

by Frankie Kerner

This album is cursed in the best way possible. Admittedly, when I first heard 100 gecs I was not a big fan. It took me a while to get into it. Initially, I thought it was trying too hard to be edgy, a Reddit kid's wet dream. Then, one day, it clicked. I gave it another try, and I was finally like, "yeah, okay, this is a bop."

This is the kind of album your mom finds on your Spotify account and it genuinely worries her about your well-being. The thing is only 10 songs and 23 minutes, but it truly changed the music world forever. The pitched-up vocals, the chaotic instrumentals from Laura Les and Dylan Brady... it's abrasive, but in a good way.

The project kicks off with "754 sticky," which is all about anxiety, making money, and anxiety from making money. Les sings, "Shit, I'm already broke and it's only 7:45 in the morning, yeah." Relatable, am I right, fellow college students?

Next, we hop right into the big boy. Everyone's number one: money machine. The track opens up with Laura Les gently welcoming us into the next minute and 54 seconds: "Hey, you lil' piss baby," she says, then proceeds to sing about "the big boys" coming with "the big trucks." Lyrical genius on this track, it's one of my favorites on the album.

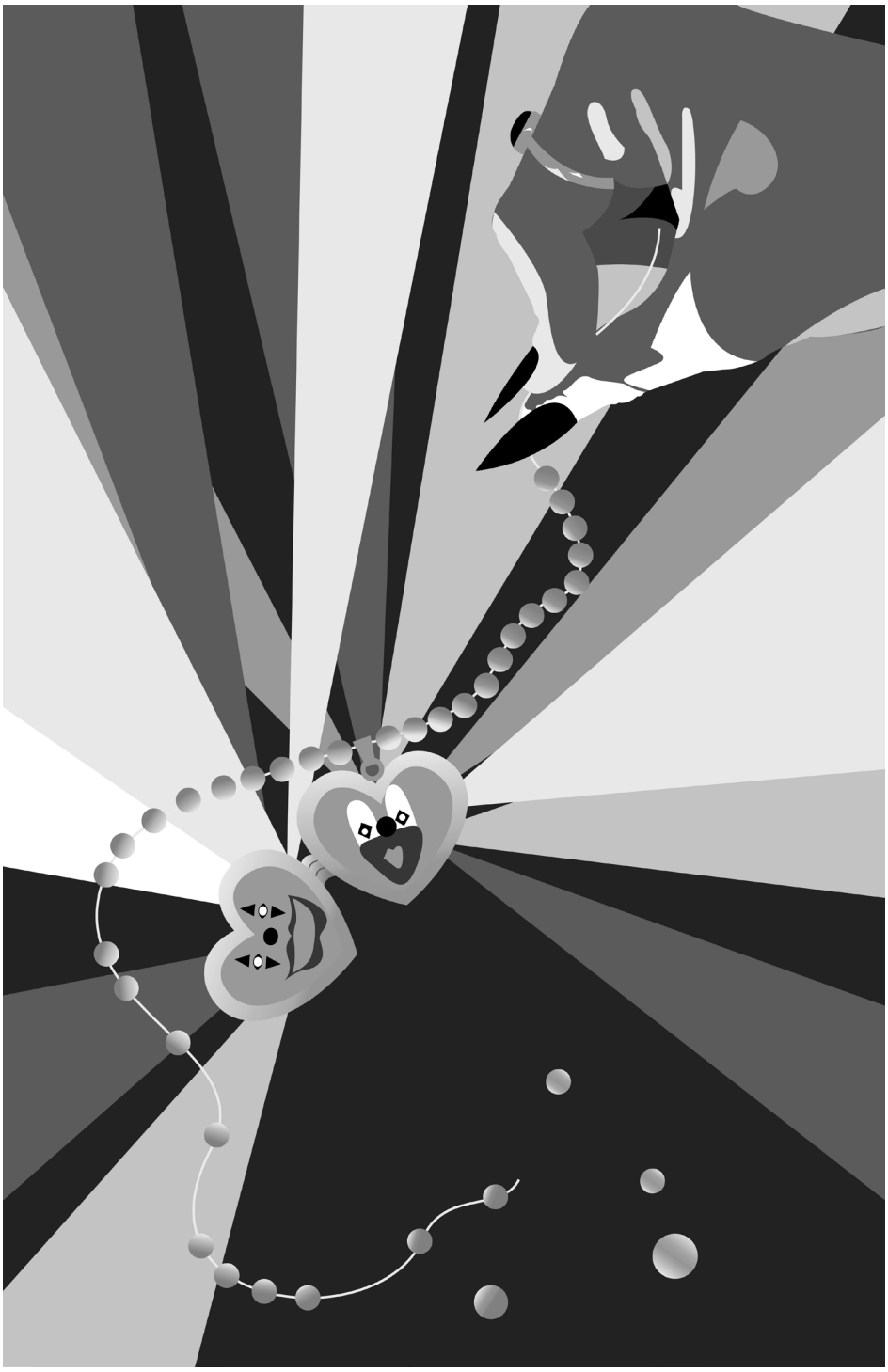
Let's talk about the fact that there's a ska song on this album. In 2019. We love to see it. Some say "stupid horse" is about a car, some say it's about heroin, others say it's just about a horse. Either way, this song is one of the highlights of the album, and the "pick it up!" ad libs are really just the icing on the cake.

To fully get to know the experimental pop duo, you should just listen to the album. Whether you like 100 gecs or hate them, everyone can probably agree that they're cursed.

This -or That ?

☐	mango	OR	pineapple	☐
☐	flaky sea salt	OR	salt lamp	☐
☐	A smart house who is also your mom	OR	Stepdad takes you to bootcamp	☐
☐	George Lopez	OR	Lizards	☐
☐	1000 gecs album	OR	1000 island dressing	☐
☐	"All good!"	OR	"No worries!"	☐
☐	Polo shirt	OR	Marco Polo	☐
☐	Croissant	OR	Animal Croissing	☐

Eleanor Klock



Danielle Lewis

The Tumbleweed

by Sophia Mick

This morning, Sonny's room is a desert.

This morning her room is in the desert, and she covers her head with her comforter, closes her eyes, and thinks maybe she has accidentally opened them a moment too soon, like getting off at the wrong bus stop or walking into the wrong classroom. Then her alarm goes off. She thinks it's funny, how she always wakes up right before her alarm. Her eyes closed and her big blanket muffling the insistent beep, she curls her toes, flexing her ankles and feeling her calf muscles tug at her bones in an effort to shake off sleep. Yesterday, she thinks, what did I do yesterday? Working in reverse order: showered, class, called her parents, made dinner, barely finished a homework assignment, feverishly cleaned her room to distract from the constant, low-grade anxiety about choosing a major, showered again. Nothing unusual. She takes a quick, deep breath and thinks, let me try this again.

Pulling the comforter down to the bridge of her nose, she peeks up at a blue sky, so open and broad that it bends at either end as if viewed through a fish-eye lens. Her wide eyes are glossy and fearful as she huddles, motionless, under the blanket. Her slim pink fingers clutch the comforter. Without moving her head, her eyes glide to her left. She takes in the photos and magazine cut outs hanging in mid-air where her custard colored walls used to be. Her gaze follows the invisible wall down toward her bundled toes, where all of her books, and plants, and her glass lamp, float above a flat, sand covered ground. Now, her eyes frantically rush past her door and land on her desk. On it sits her jewelry, jar of pens and scissors, a couple dishes from last night's dinner, and the framed photo of her parents that she sometimes liked to touch her freshly kissed fingers to.

Beyond it, in the brand-new distance Sonny can see the sun rising behind the silhouettes of far off mountains, dripping its honeyed early light across the ground and stretching blue-black shadows from the piles of boulders and tufts of dry grass. She realizes she has been holding her breath. She uncovers her nose just a bit and sucks in fresh, dry air that makes her chest feel cold. The blanket down around her chin now, her cheeks prickle at the little breath of wind. The papers on her desk flutter and settle. She sits up more fully and rubs hard at her eyes, then drags her hands down her face and holds them there with her eyes open and pulled wide in frustrated disbelief. A lizard scurries around the edge of her laundry basket and disappears and she jumps, so confused that she almost starts laughing.

She commands herself to think rationally, turns to look more closely at where her wall was, and puts out a tentative hand, expecting to come up against some invisible force. It slips through the would-be wall with ease. She swings her feet onto the

crumbly ground and tests the boundaries of this reality with cautious toes. Rolling a little pebble back and forth in the coarse sand, she watches its tiny trail, trying to figure out when she might have gone insane.

But the thing is, she doesn't feel insane, she feels pretty fine. She thinks that if she was insane, she would at least be hearing a few extra voices. She can see herself in one of her large mirrors now that she is sitting, and sure enough, she looks just like normal, fine Sonny. Her short, swampy-blonde hair is greasy and sticks up in ways only a shower will fix, her breath tastes like she wants to brush her teeth, and her silver necklaces are tangled around her slender neck. She absent mindedly works at the slinky knots and twirls while she tries to think about what might have caused all this. She notices now, that sitting just beyond the free-standing door there is a piece of paper among the tiny yellow flowers that remind her of last spring. She stands, still twisting the chains at her neck, and walks over to the door. When she kneels to pick it up, she recognizes the markings made in a pretty, thin red, and realizes it is a poem written by her friend that belongs in a box with her other precious things. It is creased in three places and the little craters of dried tears on the paper seem to have collected a fine desert dust. She recalls sitting in the corner of that one guy's dining room, having moved from a chair to the floor to cry, and reading, and re-reading the poem until her ride pulled up in the dark. She remembers how the tears dripped onto the page, punctuating the last lines:

The gap between those two aching ribs,
in time it'll fill.

And then she remembers that a friend of hers walked through the front door and asked if she was okay, to which she wiped her nose on her sleeve, laughed, and folded up the poem.

That was almost a year ago, she realizes, feeling a weird gut sadness of missing or guilt. But the poem tells her nothing about the sudden appearance of a desert. She lets out an exasperated sigh as she stretches her arms over her head. She takes a step back and stares at her room, looking especially funny from the outside. In her examination, she notices, not too far past the left wall of her room, something colorful—unnaturally colorful—perched on a rock. She goes to tuck the poem into her pocket and realizes that she is still wearing only a t-shirt and underwear. Clothes, she thinks, and turns to walk back through the door, pauses, and slips instead through what used to be the wall, just because she can.

Sonny moves to the front of her dresser, carefully pondering the only choice that she actually has control over in the moment. She tries on shorts, takes a few steps, and returns to the dresser to put on pants. For the first time, she wishes that she had those pants that zip into shorts, because they seem convenient in this situation. She decides on a pair of soft jeans and a t-shirt. She runs her fingers through her hair, pulling her scalp back and as if perhaps this will jostle something in her brain back into

appropriate place and her normal reality will reform. But nothing changes. She grabs a little backpack and instinctively snatches the orange cowboy hat she has had since Halloween off of its hook on her wall and places on her head. May as well give in to it, she thinks. She tips the brim at herself in the mirror before stepping back through the wall and heading for the spot of color.

As she wanders toward the rock, she looks more like a lost tourist than a cowboy, but she feels a bit like an outlaw. In her mind, she imagines that she has been left for dead in the middle of a desert by her gunslinging rival. No, she thinks, a gunslinging rival would have just shot her. She wishes she had a horse.

When she reaches the rock, she sees that the colorful dot is a yellow and red disposable Kodak, with a date and description scrawled across the top: 9/20/18 "Last week at home." Her brow furrows, and she remembers the photos that came from the disposable. One of her mom as they drove home from her dad's shop with a big plume of smoke in the background because a building off of 82nd had caught on fire. Another of her family on their deck chatting after dinner in the underexposed warmth of sunset. One of four of her friends, the stragglers, in her room wearing a hilarious collection of the clothes that she wasn't taking to school. She smiles, a little sad. It makes her think about all of the fear and expectations she had at the time, how many of them came true, and how many of them were bullshit.

She picks up the camera and holds the viewfinder up to her eye, looking through it back at her room, and then all around, and stopping when she sees a little book tucked into the soft shade of some brush. Ok, she thinks, very funny. She presses down the shutter, knowing full well that the roll is already done and takes off walking.

She recognizes the little Salinger paperback as her own by the tiny hearts in the margins marking the best lines. She reads a couple of them. This was, generally, her favorite book, although that was kind of a lie, because it was really a whole collection of his short stories that she thought added up to her favorite book. It was only recently that she had given them all this title, after she had finally finished reading Seymour, An Introduction over last winter break when she had been taking lots of baths and crying more than usual. Or, about as often as usual according to more recent standards.

Sonny looks around. She thinks that she could go back to her room but doesn't really want to yet. She is eager to be distracted, to have something new to think about, to be somewhere exciting, even if it is this desert. She starts to wander and soon enough the tiny speck that was her room disappears behind a small sandy embankment. She finds more things, laid out in the sand, discarded. A journal of hers, mostly from freshman year of college. She knows what is written on most of the pages and doesn't want to reread it because while some of the minor issues have been resolved, the major concerns still linger. She's still confused and angry and sad, and though she thinks that she has adjusted, maybe she is just ignoring it all; she mostly doesn't know

how to be okay with growing up.

She finds a ring, one that she is beyond happy to see because she thought she lost it in her dorm bathroom, and her grandma had given it to her on her 18th birthday. There's a stuffed animal too, a gray rabbit filled with the kind of weighted stuffing that makes its head flop over to one side. His name was Thumper. She finds letters too, from her friends and her parents. The kinds of letters they tended to write to one another for important milestones: birthdays, graduations. Sonny doesn't want to read them for the same reason she doesn't want to read the journal. She tucks them all into her bag.

Sonny walks for some time and then stops. She arrives at a cliff that overlooks the expanse of desert. She wonders when she started walking uphill, her legs don't feel tired. She sits and dangles her feet over the edge, something that would usually put her ill at ease. As the sky grows dim, stars begin to appear. She lays back and looks up at them—there are so many. She looks as small as she feels, the whole stretch of space above and below her. Yesterday seems as though it was much more than a day ago and Sonny wishes that she felt sure about something. Or felt some easy feeling about anything at all. The sky begins to grow pink again, so she stands and brushes off the dirt and the thoughts that she was lost in and starts back down the cliff. The sun is growing harsh and towering red-tan boulders pile up out of nowhere, full of dark cracks where life must be hiding for the hot afternoon. A noise bounces off of the massive towers from far away, a metal sound, loud and banging. Sonny's ears perk, and she looks around just as the sound stops. Sonny freezes for a silent moment and the sound starts again. They play Marco Polo until Sonny rounds the corner of a large boulder and sees the shape of a car sitting out in the desert, the loud noise bouncing from it towards Sonny.

She sees the car before she is able to decipher the person underneath it, laying on their back on one of those mechanic's dollies, excitedly clanking around in what seems to be an attempt to fix the vehicle. Only, this particular car looks as though it has driven through at least one war zone. All of its windows, including the front and back, have been bashed in, and it has a massive gash across one side where the door metal is tearing up and away from the car like a wing.

"Hello?" Sonny says and after no response steps closer, noticing now that the car seats that remain have collected little dunes of sand. There are tiny yellow flowers growing in the gritty dust that has piled up in the trunk. It still has a steering wheel, ironic considering the car is sitting propped up on cinderblocks with no tires in site.

"Hey!" she says, more loudly this time, and the person—a woman, Sonny thinks—under the car stops and pushes herself out in one quick shove. When her face is out in the open, Sonny's eyes go wide and her face whitens from its warm desert flush.

"What?" the woman says, shading eyes indistinguishable from Sonny's with a greasy but unmistakably similar hand. Sonny's mouth hangs open, her arm pointing a confused accusatory finger toward the woman. They stare at each other until Sonny chokes up words.

"You're me," she stutters, and takes a breath like she might continue, but instead abruptly sits down as though it wasn't really a choice but a necessity. The woman, perhaps ten years older, rolls her eyes and grabs another tool from her side and shuffles herself back underneath the car to resume her tinkering. Sonny cocks her head to one side, peering under the belly of the car, her face contorted in shock and concern.

"Is this not surprising to you? Because this is really fucking weird for me. Can you hear my thoughts, do you know what I'm feeling?" Sonny begins to ramble, and the older Sonny under the car drops her tools in exasperation and waits for her to finish, "How old are you? Am I just insane or do you see this too, well obviously I'm insane I woke up in the middle of a—"

From under the car the older Sonny cuts her off with noise of frustration.

"Look," she says, rolling herself forward just a little so that they can make eye contact, which Sonny expects to feel bizarre but it's more or less like looking in a mirror, "I've got a lot of work to do here."

Sonny looks offended and scoffs, "Is this not weird for you?"

"I don't know man," she says with upturned palms, "weirder things have happened."

Sonny doesn't ask her to elaborate, though she wants to, because Older Sonny resumes whatever was making the loud banging noise. Sonny sits shell shocked until Older Sonny stops again and wheels herself back out to get another tool.

"Wait," Sonny says, before Older Sonny has a chance to disappear, "when did you get here? How did you get here?"

"It just," she shrugs, "happened."

"How long ago?"

It looks like Older Sonny is pondering her answer, but then Sonny realizes she is examining something above her on the car, she starts messing with it.
Sonny shakes her head and starts ruffling through her bag, pulling out the papers and things.

"Do you recognize—are these yours too?" she holds them forward under the car, dropping the stuffed rabbit in the sand. Older Sonny glances down at them and then back up to the car.

"Sure, I don't know, they look familiar."
Sonny sighs, and puts the things away, she leans over and looks around a broken headlight into the endless stretch of desert before her.

"Do you want to leave?" Sonny asks. Older Sonny scoffs like she couldn't imagine a more stupid question.

"Why do you think I'm fixing this car?" she says impatiently. Sonny is quiet for a moment; Older Sonny's legs push back and forth.

"Does it get easier?" Sonny asks. She sighs an exaggerated sigh and wheels herself back out, holding a wrench.

"What?"

Sonny huffs a little breath of air out of her nose and slumps forward, "nevermind."

Older Sonny returns to the car, scooting herself to the front now so that Sonny has to shuffle herself out of the way.

"How long have you been working on this?" Sonny asks.

"Days, weeks, years, decades, I don't know," she sounds annoyed but sincere. Sonny sits, watching her. It's hard to tell what Older Sonny is actually doing with all of the tools laid out in the sandy dirt, but she seems focused, frantic. After a while Sonny stands and brushes the dust from her pants.

"You know there's no tires," She says, clear and loud enough for Older Sonny to hear, but gets no response.

"Ok," Sonny says, and starts walking again.

Eventually the trail of items resumes, but they are no longer ones Sonny recognizes. A delicate, romantic necklace. Another book, inked hearts in its margins though she's never read it. A box full of little gifts. A letter to Sonny addressed to a place she doesn't know. A pair of earrings, some cards, a painting. They may as well belong in the desert, but Sonny puts them in her pack anyways.

The slate of mountains on the far horizon are beginning to turn pink and purple in the late afternoon. Sonny watches a snake slink out from under shady brush, leaving an intestinal pattern in the sand as it looks for dinner. How easy it must be to live so simply. She wonders if she would make a good snake.

Sonny follows its path with her gaze and when she reaches the end and looks up, she sees a house. It isn't hers; she is beginning to think that she might not see her house again, a thought that floats to the surface and is gone before she even starts walking. It's small and made of weathered wood; shack might be a better word for it. She notices as she gets closer that sitting on the porch in a rocking chair is an old woman. Her hair is white and long, drifting around behind her as she stares straight ahead and rocks methodically, skin tanned from what must be years of desert sun. Sonny approaches the side, glancing through a low, dust-covered window she sees a bare interior. She continues around to the front steps, clearing her voice as she moves, not wanting to startle the woman, who has a shotgun laid across her lap.

"Hello?" Sonny says. For someone who looks to have been here forever, the

woman's gaze lowers, unsurprised, to meet Sonny's. She says nothing. On the porch, the old woman is taller than Sonny, making her feel small and fragile. Sonny sniffs, looks the woman up and down, and removes her hat with one hand, sliding the other through her hair. There is something immediately familiar in her eyes, the structure of her worn face.

"So, are you me too?" Sonny looks at the woman's bare feet, recognizing the jutting bones on the sides of her feet, the hem of her white nightgown brushing at her bony ankles. The woman makes a little noise that seems affirmative.

"Can I sit?" Sonny asks, gesturing toward the top step and when the woman doesn't respond, she walks up the stairs slowly. Through the screen door, Sonny can see now that the house is really, entirely empty. The woman and the shotgun strike her as funny, their position appearing so protective, but with nothing to protect; just bare walls and floors containing a whole lot of empty space. Not even ghost towns could look so bare.

"Where are we?" Sonny asks, watching the old woman's face. Sonny can see the reflection of the desert in her watery eyes, she thinks she can even see the clouds moving, and the little sun setting in the double reflection. When the woman blinks, Sonny realizes that she is crying, tears spread into her creased skin making it shimmer. The woman nods and opens her mouth ever so slightly.

"That's the million-dollar question isn't it?" the woman says in a small voice, Sonny feels the resonance of the woman's speech in her own chest, the warm familiarity of it makes her want to cry too.

"Why are you here?" Sonny asks, squinting up at the woman then looks down toward her feet. The woman just stares ahead and says simply, "I don't know how to leave."

Sonny stays quiet for a while, trying to keep herself from crying she pulls the book and papers from her bag, thumbs through the pages, skimming random words, then drops them all on the steps. She gestures to them and looks up at the woman.

"Do you recognize these?" Sonny feels a prickle of fear for the woman's response. The woman glances down, her eyes still welled with tears tinged gold from the sun, but her face blank.

"They must have been ours once," she wipes a soft hand across her cheek. Sonny picks up the stack.

"They're still mine," she responds. The woman shakes her head back and forth, slow. Sonny sinks her chin down to rest in her palm, starts shifting dust back and forth under her foot. Looking toward the reddening horizon, Sonny feels a pang of fear in her stomach. Desperately, she turns to the old woman.

"Did you ever try to leave?" She says, on the verge of tears.

The woman speaks slow, and Sonny glances over, watch her age-textured hands move delicately across her lap, "I'm still here aren't I?"

"What happens if I stay here," Sonny says to the ground. Her foot has made a pattern in the sand. She looks at her fingers, sees them for a moment as the old fingers on the woman's lap, and wonders if she could just sit there forever in this flat desert and watch the days pass in orange and purple and blue like a human sun dial.

Behind Sonny the old woman's hands glide soft and gentle towards her gun. Sonny turns at the sound of a metallic chk-chk, to face the barrel of the woman's shotgun. The gun is so close to her forehead that Sonny has to go cross-eyed not to see it in double. Looking past its long dark cylindrical neck, into her empty eyes, Sonny knows the answer to her question.

Without moving her gaze, Sonny reaches a hand down and picks up her things, placing her hat on her head, as though she has finally come to face her gunslinging rival. Sonny stands, slowly, and backs down the steps, holding the woman's gaze and watching her aim follow until she is just a bit of negative space between the brush, sand, and stone. And then, Sonny runs.

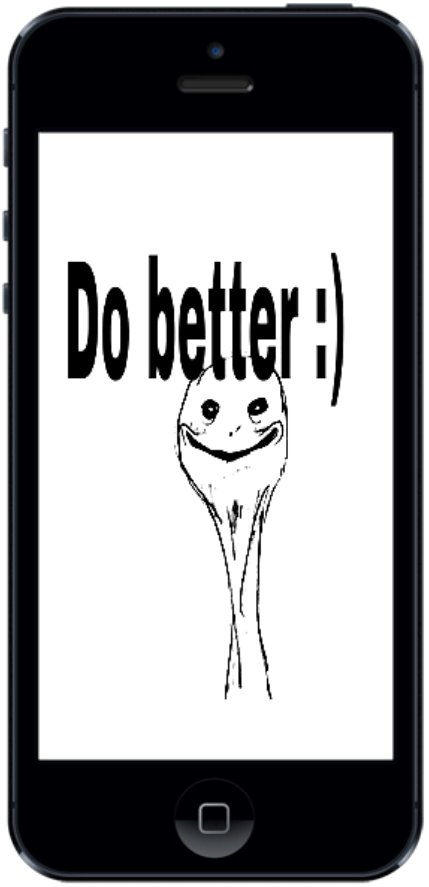
Runs until she feels like she can't, until her lungs hurt, and her legs are burning, and then keeps running, blurring through the desert until the sun settles right above the mountain horizon and she spots a stretch of unbelievable green. She hopes that this means water, hit suddenly with a wave of thirst.

It does. A creek spreads fingerlike in the sand, bordered by green life. Sonny kneels, brings her dripping hands, full, to her lips. She sits, breathes. She watches the water, as it dances, pools, and trickles; not rushing, but moving nonetheless, down a path of its own creation. She takes off her shoes and steps in, the water curling and sliding past her ankles. She thinks, all of this sweet, smooth water must be headed someplace. And she wants to follow.

Cameron Brentlinger

TEEN SMOKING

A Jumpscare For Selves That Want To Better, A Boogeyman That Positively Enforces, and An Image That Builds In Your Spine Whilst it Chills



Charlotte Foote

Productive Perversity and *Comfort Woman*: Forging New Ways of Being

by Kaya Noteboom

Are these end times we're living in? This question hangs in the air, heavy and plump. Souring sugars excitedly rearrange under building pressure of confinement. I'm tempted to engage in doomsday fantasies the second disaster appears imminent even though, when disaster strikes, it never really strikes me. Maybe a scratch, a flesh wound at most. A quickness to anticipate end times alongside my inevitable escape from it is an emblem of my privilege. I try to imagine what my world will look like months from now—nothing is concrete but in every version of the future, I am safe. The truth is, realities far more gruesome than any apocalypse I could imagine, happened and are still happening. Globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and military imperialism have punched down their meaty fists, murdering in apocalyptic numbers for centuries, which impose harm both transnationally and across generations. As unstable as this time may feel, people have found ways to survive apocalyptic conditions under colonial violence forever. Perhaps optimism feels out of reach because these stories of survival, as well as the innumerable deaths, are made invisible. I look towards the Asian women and queer diasporas who find new ways of existing as survival through asserting their agency, visibility, and belonging in forging these paths. I will be reading closely from The Hypersexuality of Race by Celine Parreñas Shimizu, and "Peminist and Queer Affiliation in Literature as a Blueprint for Filipinx Decolonization and Liberation," by Thomas Xavier Sarmiento, to borrow their theorizations of queer Asian/American feminisms through their examinations of contentious images. Their work focuses on cultural representations as a locus for theorizing identity formation. Using their theory, I will be meditating on the productive possibilities of trauma through an analysis of the novel, Comfort Woman, by Nora Okja Keller.

Before we can even imagine modes of survival or the existential possibilities of trauma, we need to understand how that process of transformation can place. Celine Parreñas Shimizu offers a term for this process called, productive perversity. She explains the process like this:

"When consuming perverse images, representation must be remembered as a lively encounter and a situated experience full of multiple desires and identifications. Perversity in viewing is

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produced at various sites: the creation of non-normative sexualities in representations as well as perverse identifications with the themes and characters. Perverse authorships and spectatorships need to be accounted for in analyses of racialized sexual representation because of their critique of normative subjectivities. That is, sexual proclivities attributed to Asian actresses and their fictional roles in popular culture provide the terrain for asserting productively perverse Asian American female subjectivities. The position of perversity is productive not only if it creates standards of measurement beyond the acceptable and the normal but also if it offers alternative forms of being in terms of race, sexuality, and representation." (Shimizu, 57).

Here, Shimizu makes efficient use of this term by accepting the position of Asian/American women as perverse and non-normative as preliminary knowledge. By accepting this position at the forefront, she is able to push both the theoretical as well as practical possibilities of this position to its limit. Shimizu welcomes her audience to harshly criticize the notion of normalcy as a standard to live up to, and instead regard normalcy as an imperial tool to construct the image of an opposing and inferior nation, which aims to silence and carry out violence on to those the image of perversity is imposed. Only from the position of accepting the perverse may we see that the perverse are free from the limitations of a person who attempts—unsuccessfully—to achieve normalcy.

Like Shimizu, Sarmiento finds "productive possibilities" in centering the subjectivity of queer and women Asian/American through the authorship and spectatorship of non-normative representations and queer political orientations. Sarmiento finds subjectivity within the canon of diasporic Filipinx literature, specifically for the purpose of Filipinx decolonization. Sarmiento proposes that literature can act as a "valuable arm of political activism," as an effort to "resurrect buried artistic and political models" (82, Sarmiento), by centering queer Filipinx subjectivity in worlds that are free from the bounds of reality but engage in the fraught colonial and imperialized history of the Philippines and the Filipinx diaspora. The fictional modality is advantageous for planning decolonized futures because,

"Through its fictive world making and re-membering, diasporic Filipinx literature blurs the lines between real and imaginary, between recorded History and speculative histories. In so doing, it opens up a space to see and feel differently. As Kandice Chuh (2003, 35-36) argues, Filipinx American literature directs Asian American studies to understand the field as not simply a discourse of race and ethnicity but 'a discourse of sexuality' and postcoloniality. In disloyalty to nation and its refusal to represent a singular identity formation, such cultural production aligns with intersectional feminisms' call to take seriously the mutually constitutive nature of oppression and queer theory's deconstruction

of identity. As opposed to interpreting such texts exclusively as social history, I read them as aesthetic pedagogies that provide clues to how our world is and ought to be" (Sarmiento, 84).

Sarmiento's tactic is similar to Shimizu's in that they both view artistic expressions as sites of resistance and agency with the power to re-imagine identity for themselves and for their communities through the specificity of representation. I also appreciate how they both understand and accept their positions as a basis for their work to imagine what productive possibilities can emerge from them. In Sarmiento's case, accepting the invisibility of queer and female Filipinx histories in academia, acknowledging that those histories exist despite their invisibility, allows for us to be spectators and authors of a decolonizing Filipinx history that has existed and is simultaneously in the midst of formation.

Sarmiento and Shimizu both find the positionality of Asian/American women, non-normative genders, and sexualities to be useful cites for developing more radical and nuanced theoretical frameworks to approach identity formation. The identity formation that Shimizu charts is through a framework of "bondage" which accounts for the viewing and authorial relationships Asian/American women have with the hypersexual representations of Asian femininity. In this experience, the viewer both objectively enjoys the lavish absurdity of what they are seeing, and are conversely horrified, "misrecognizing" this performance as a direct reflection of themselves, and perhaps also reminding them of the gendered trauma they've experienced as being misrecognized by others The pain/pleasure, love/hate, experience (4, Shimizu), which Shimizu calls the bind of representation, demonstrates the incongruity of agency and visibility of Asian/American women on screen with the full range of real Asian/American women sexualities.

Shimizu uses the bind of representation to, "describe how actresses caught within the performance of hypersexuality insert themselves within the limited terms available to them," and similarly to describe how spectators, "bound by hypersexual representation, which they complete in order to secure the meaning of the production, whether toward normative aims or alternative readings," (Shimizu, 52). At the experiential level, the bind of representation is a relationship to images which inhibits Asian/American women from asserting their agency because of how the fear of being misrecognized causes people to police and silence their own desires. However, Shimizu proves that this relationship to images is a fascinating vehicle for identity formation and claiming agency over one's own desires. "If Asian/American women's subjection is fundamentally dependent on sex, creating parameters for Asian women's presences n popular film and in history, racialized sexuality on screen must then be sites where the bondage of representation is itself reimagined, recast and criticized at the very moment of performance," (Shimizu,

61). In both small and large roles, as actors, authors, and spectators, Asian/American women assert their agency and open windows for those experienced and complex narratives to come through, as well as forging the way for new narratives to be written.

Alternative close-readings of perverse images are essential to Shimizu's theoretical practice in productive perversities and existential possibilities. We can see how she imagines new narratives, breathing life and agency into representations which on their face are restrictive, in her deep analysis of the Mongol slave girl (played by Anna May Wong) in The Thief of Bagdad (1924). In this seemingly minor role, Wong is portrayed as villainous, conniving, and a visible threat to the goals the supposed heroes of this story. The unengaged spectator will read Wong's appearance in this film to be merely a mechanism of furthering the plot, a character with no motivation or story, existing only to thwart the white protagonist. However, in Shimizu's alternative reading of the Mongol slave girl, she exists as a character with agency and desires independent of the white characters at the center of the film. In one particularly tense moment of the film, the Mongol salve girl poisons the white princess whom she serves. Shimizu describes the scene like this:

"Upon this act of assault, executed with an expression of determination, the Mongol slave girl releases herself from the servile bond to her mistress so that she no longer supplements her in the rest of the narrative. To be sure, the ac of drugging the princess is a sexualized one. After making contact and caressing her hand over the princess's mouth, the slave girl understand[s] the volatility of her actions and looks around to make sure no one sees her. This highly charged act transforms the Mongol slave girl into the subject position of vixen, now with a more viable future that competes directly with the princess's position." (Shimizu, 71).

What I appreciate about this alternative reading is that we are able to imbue a seemingly voiceless character with lively personality, conflicting desires, and agency in deciding the fate of her future. This is all attributed to her under the guise of the invisibility and disposability that is supposed to be inscribed onto her by the director and writers of this film, but we can imagine a life for her beyond that intention.

The alternative reading of the Mongol slave girl is what informs the way I read and imagine the life of Akiko (Soon Hyo) in Comfort Woman, by Nora Okja Keller. Comfort Woman follows the parallel narratives of a mother and daughter who live on mainland Hawaii who are grappling with the generational trauma of Japanese imperialism in Korea which forced Akiko, Beccah's mother, into sex slavery. This trauma haunts them both as they make their way to the United States with Akiko's American missionary husband. Akiko experiences the haunting of her trauma through a profoundly intimate connection to the spirit realm. This connection is felt the most through a spirit named,

Induk.

Akiko's visits from Induk are described like this: "She comes in singing, entering with full voice, filling me so that there is no me except for her, Induk." (Okja-Keller, 36). There is a way to read this description of Induk entering Akiko in a way that prescribes this to be a description of a dissociative experience as a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. While there is evidence to point to this, and given the horrific trauma Akiko endured in comfort station at the hands of innumerable men, and the inferred trauma that takes place within her marriage, it would make sense that she would suffer from PTSD. However, there are so many instances in the novel which strongly suggest that is Induk not only a manifestation of Akiko's dissociations, but something more intimate and evolving.

Directly following the description of Induk entering Akiko's body, Akiko recounts the first time Induk came to her:

"That first time, she found me sprawled next to an unnamed stream above the Yalu, the place where I had discarded my empty body, and invited herself in... Here, baby, here, Induk said, her voice creaking like a hundred thousand frogs. She shuffled closer, hands cupping her breasts, which turned into an offering of freshly unearthed ginseng... There was no need for me to get up. I lay by the river, already feeling the running water erode the layers of my skin, washing me away, but Induk filled my belly and forced me to my hands and knees. She led me to the double rainbow where virgins climb to heaven and told me to climb." (Okja-Keller, 36-38).

In this passage, Akiko runs from her forced abortion at the comfort station and lays by an unnamed stream to die. Akiko is hollowed by her pain and everything that has happened to her. She feels like there is nothing left of her and she is ready to die. But before she does, Induk enters her body. Instead of death, Induk comes to her, giving Akiko enough life to keep going, and guides her to the ginseng root. Then, she tells her where to go to find a woman who then takes her to the missionaries.

Induk appears to Akiko bearing resemblance to her mother but also as the Akiko at the camp before her, whom she took her place in the stalls. This passage offers a complicated image of Induk and the relationship Akiko has to her. At once appearing with her hair worn like her mother's, "long strips of hair coming undone from the married woman's bun at the back of her neck," and stroking Akiko's head in her lap, combing out the tangles in her hair, but then Induk over and over again is said to "enter" Akiko which can to no doubt be read as a sexual act. Instances in which Induk enters Akiko, such as this first time, are made in stark contrast to when Akiko has sex with the men at the camp and with her husband.

The first time Akiko's husband beckons her to their bed to have sex, the encounter is met with the weight of every man that came to Akiko in the stalls at the camp. When her husband asks if

she knows, "what it feels like to take a man," she thinks to herself, "I knew what if felt like to stretch open for many men, and I knew about the blood with the first and with the hundredth, and about pain sharp enough to cut your body your body from your mind." Then, after they have sex, she says, "I let my mind fly away. For I knew then that my body was, and always would be, locked in a cubicle at the camps, trapped under the bodies of innumerable men," (Okja-Keller, 106). The sex portrayed between Akiko and her husband is dismal in that she is returned to empty and painful station of sex slavery and in turn her soul must vacate her body in order to live through it. In contrast, when Induk enters Akiko, Akiko is present in her body and meets Induk with relief, gratitude, and pleasure. Induk is not bound to Akiko as solely a mother figure. Her form is unbound by "earthly bodies." Because of this, Induk is not relegated to the boundaries between mother and daughter, and can transgress into the realm of guardian, and even lover.

The relationship between Induk and Akiko has no bounds at all. When Induk enters Akiko, they become one. Their union is not only a metaphor for a relationship, but a possibility for a new way of being. Within Akiko's body, Induk comes to her as a guide, mother, protector, and lover, but it is never forgotten that this union occurs within Akiko's vacated body. It is also never forgotten that their union could never take place without the unspeakable violence that Akiko endures under the imperial gendered violence serving as a sex slave in the Japanese military camps, and within her marriage to the American missionary. Akiko's site of trauma then becomes the site in which she is able to claim her own pleasure through the boundless relationship with Induk, thus claiming her agency.

Through this trauma, Akiko is able to transcend one form of existence and welcome an entirely new one forged in the sexual bond between her and her connection to the spirit realm through Induk as an act of productive perversity. Then, through the work of Sarmiento, we are able to read the sexual bond not only as direct allegory for the history of trauma and survival of Korean comfort women. We can choose to read this relationship as a blueprint for forging new ways of existing, finding productive possibilities through sites of trauma, and in the process, claim visibility and agency over our lives.

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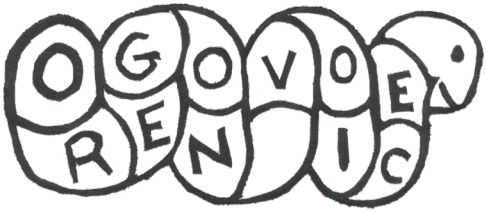
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